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RUEHNEH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSK RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHAH #0140 0290916
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 290916Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2220
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2553
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4759
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2418
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3005
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3286
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000140

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP, ECA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [MARR](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: CENTCOM VISIT TO TURKMENISTAN COVERED
ACCURATELY

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: USCENCOM Commander General Petraeus made his first official visit to Turkmenistan January 15-16. State media highlighted the visit, especially the General's meeting with Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. International media also covered the visit largely based on the Embassy press release and state media reporting. END SUMMARY

MEDIA ANNOUNCES GENERAL PETRAEUS VISIT TO TURKMENISTAN

13. (U) On January 15, the Russian news agency "Itar-Tass" (Russian) and the Associated Press (English), based on an Embassy press release, announced the arrival of General Petraeus in Turkmenistan, carrying generally accurate details on his visit. The same evening, the state television's "Watan" news program (Turkmen) and the government-run website "Turkmenistan Golden Age" (www.turkmenistan.gov.tm) (Turkmen, Russian and English) reported on the impending arrival, giving accurate details about the purpose of the visit and planned meetings with Turkmen officials. Similar reports appeared on the following day in state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 46,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091). Azeri news agency "Trend" (Russian, English), Russian "Interfax" (English) and Chinese "Xinhua" (Russian) also announced the visit, based on state media reports and the Embassy press release.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHT GENERAL'S MEETING WITH TURKMEN LEADER

14. (U) On January 16, the "Watan" TV news program (Turkmen) highlighted Petraeus' meeting with President Berdimuhamedov as its top story, emphasizing Turkmenistan's readiness to expand cooperation with the United States and the international community. Petraeus' post-meeting remarks were carried directly with an accurate Turkmen translation. The following day, state-run dailies "Neutral Turkmenistan" (Russian) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen) carried articles similar to the Watan broadcast on their front pages. The state website "Turkmenistan Golden Age" (Turkmen, Russian and English) also posted similar articles on the meeting. (NOTE: The Watan TV news program rebroadcasts its content several times the following day. END NOTE.)

15. (U) In subsequent days, following the presidential meeting,

several news agencies such as Russian "Interfax-AVN" and "RIA Oreanda" (English), the Turkmen opposition website "watan.ru" (English, Russian), Azeri "Trend" (English, Russian) and India's "UNI" (United News of India) (English) gave generally accurate stories on the meeting. (NOTE: Most of the articles were based or referred to state media reporting. END NOTE.)

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: Overall coverage was typical for an official meeting with President Berdimuhamedov: vague, but positive stories on Turkmenistan receiving a high-level visitor. However, the emphasis in state media on Turkmenistan's willingness to cooperate with the United States appears to signal the government's effort to portray strong relations with a variety of countries, consistent with its policy of neutrality. Most of the usual state media outlets provided nearly identical coverage of the event, with the unusual exception of Russia-based pro-government website "turkmenistan.ru" (Russian, English), an unusual omission.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Much of the international, particularly Russian, news media used the Embassy press release in characterizing the CENTCOM visit. Negative spin or speculation about the visit was minimal. Post believes that the early press release helped keep international coverage accurate. But it is also important to note that media were also distracted by reports that Kyrgyzstan would close the Manas airbase. END COMMENT.

MILES